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October 1981

MART

The Retailer's Magazine of Electronics/Appliance Profit Improvement

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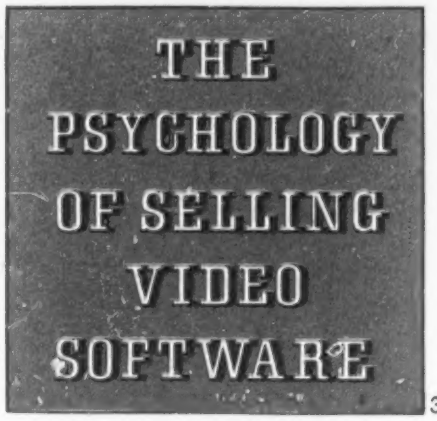

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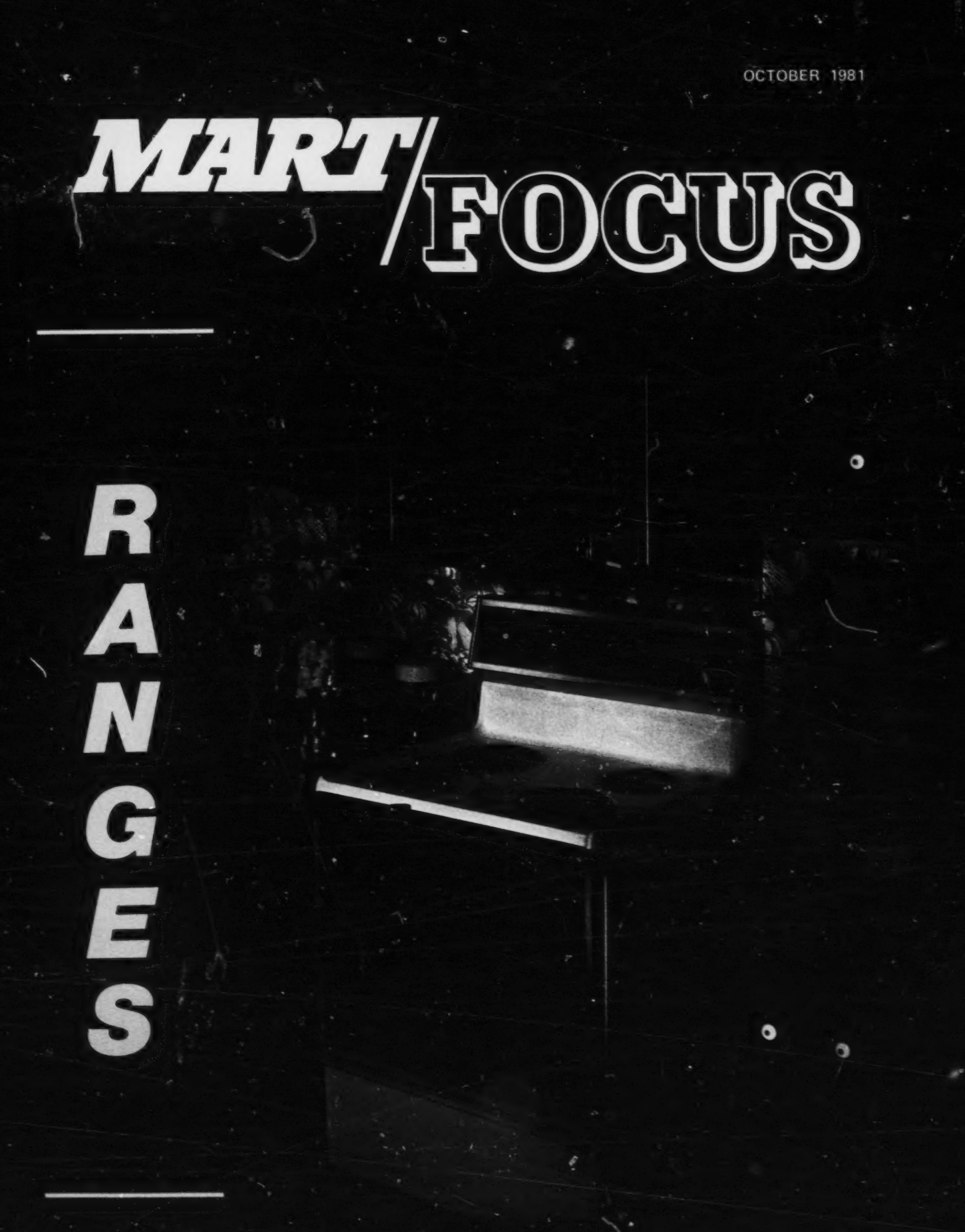
MART/FOCUS

RANGES



Changing lifestyles force range suppliers to produce a variety of cooking appliances

Consumer preferences are leaning toward speed and versatility

Make no mistake about it: some dramatic changes will take place in the cooking-appliance business in the next decade.

Changes in society, changes in family structure and size, changes in home design, and higher home construction costs will all have a marked impact on the appliance industry. And perhaps the impact will be felt most strongly by cooking-appliance retailers.

As more diverse lifestyles evolve in our society, it is becoming increasingly obvious that no one cooking appliance will satisfy all segments of the society.

Although a large segment of the population fits the traditional definition of a family—a husband and a wife with three or more children—a large and growing number of alternative family formations are becoming evident.

- More women are entering the workplace, and thus logically leading to more working wives and more two-income families.
- More couples are deciding not to have children or are limiting their families to one or two children.
- More single-person households are being established than ever before. This segment is the fastest-growing category in the population.

At the same time, home-building costs are climbing out of the reach of many consumers, so the size of the typical home is being scaled-down to keep costs down. The kitchen is taking on more importance in the floor plan of the scaled-down contemporary American home.

The American dream—a single-family home with a private yard—is more a dream and less a reality than at any time in our history. Apartments, condominiums, and other multiple-household homes with shared yards, and shared maintenance responsibilities are becoming standard.

Richard Roza, vice-president marketing, Hardwick Stove told MART that with the cost of new and previously owned homes continuing to climb, and ultra-high interest rates prevailing, consumers are being forced into apartments and condominiums. Since floor space is limited, Roza feels gradually the size of cooking appliances will have to be scaled down to fit into the new living spaces. "We see a growing need for compact units with top-end features to fit into the smaller homes," he said.

A huge number of new household formations will occur in the next decade, and these households will all need appliances. These new householders, coupled with replacement customers, ensure a huge market for cooking appliances. But the difficult question for marketing executives is, "What kind of appliances will the consumers of the future want?"

Some of the answers are obvious.

With more working wives and less time for meal preparation, more and more families will want quick-cooking alternatives to the traditional gas or electric range. And certainly microwave ovens and microwave ranges will be one area of dramatic growth over the next few years.

Executives of microwave-oven manufacturing companies say that while growth in the countertop microwave oven market will continue to be dramatic, growth in the combination microwave/range market will be faster.

Don Johnstone of Litton Microwave predicts that by the mid-1980s microwave-range sales will grow to about 16 percent of the market (currently they are less than 10 percent). He also sees a growing demand for over-the-range microwave ovens.

And Romano Conti, vice president of marketing for Tappan, feels the combination unit, a gas or electric range with a microwave oven on top, will become a more important market factor as kitchen space gets smaller.

Hoyle Rymer, president of Magic Chef, added that the combination microwave range, either in a conventional-cooking, single-cavity configuration, or in an over-under configuration, will eventually dominate the range market.

Jim West, vice president and general manager of General Electric's range products division, also feels the combination range will be the trend of the future, although he feels strongly that electric/microwave combos will be the main direction the technology will take.

"Microwave technology will blend with the electric range," West told MART.

As consumers become more comfortable with microwave ovens, he added, the microwave unit will move into the primary cooking-appliance category. In fact, West commented, "it could happen that in 1981, for the first time, microwave ovens could outsell combined gas- and electric-range sales."

Microwave ovens have grown to a point where unit sales are almost equal to the combined unit sales of both gas and electric ranges.

Convection ovens are a big question mark at this point. While convection offers some of the speed of a microwave oven, for most foods it is not as fast as a microwave. Convection-only units have not succeeded in a countertop configu-

[Continued on page 4-S]

MART MONEY MAKER

'Retailers are doing themselves and their customers a favor when they step customers up to more expensive, but more efficient, cooking appliances. It's often difficult to convince a customer to pay extra for a feature. But if you can demonstrate that the extra money will be paid back in a relatively short time with reduced operating costs, you can often make the bigger-ticket sale.'

—Romano Conti, Tappan

Range manufacturers cope with changing consumer lifestyles

[Continued from page 3-S]

ration as manufacturers had predicted they would. But those producers in the business say that for the things it does well—primarily baking and roasting—the convection oven can't be beat.

In addition to the benefit of the speed of microwave and convection cooking, both cooking methods provide energy savings over conventional ways of cooking. And over the next few years energy costs are expected to continue to rise dramatically, making any energy-saving feature more desirable.

The balance of the gas- and electric-range market—which for the last few years has been heavily weighted toward the electric-range side of the scale—will fluctuate with the price and availability of gas.

According to Jim Ruberti, vice president of marketing for Brown Stove Works, if all factors were equal more consumers would prefer to cook on a gas range than an electric range.

But for the last few years in most areas of the country consumers have had serious questions about gas pricing and availability. Some areas of the country have had to impose restrictions on new gas hookups. But some evidence now exists that the gas-range market is rebounding. "Two years ago, everyone said the gas range business was dead," Ruberti told MART. "But assuming competitive pricing and availability, the market for gas ranges will grow."

Rymer of Magic Chef told MART there is a shift toward gas. In particular, he said, the number of gas ranges with self-cleaning features is growing faster than most segmentsof the range market.

Conti of Tappan was even more optimistic in his evaluation of the gas-range market. He expects that in the next few years the gas range market will grow at a much faster rate than electric, because he expects the price of gas to be significantly lower than electric-range operating costs.

Electric-range producers are predictably not so optimistic about the future of the gas-range business. After deregulation of gas prices, they say, the cost of gas could make owning gas appliances prohibitively expensive.

Over the next few years, if the housing market rebounds as expected, electric ranges will probably get the lion's share of new business.

MART MONEY MAKER

'Dealers should have a variety of product on display on the retail sales floor, but not an overwhelming variety of product. Many of the best appliance merchants carry two or three lines of ranges and keep a number of models from each line on the floor. Customers can get confused by too many lines and models. Offer variety, but don't over-do it.'

—Jim Ruberti, Brown Stove Works

Ken Kaminski, merchandising manager of ranges for Whirlpool, believes electric ranges will continue to lead gas ranges in sales. New-home construction will include primarily electric ranges, he said. Gas ranges will be relegated primarily to replacement sales.

While microwave-related products such as combination ranges and built-in microwave ovens will experience the greatest growth over the next few years, he said, the free-standing electric range will stabilize at about 2.5 million units a year.

Jim West of General Electric's range products division agrees that the electric range's share of the market is growing.

"We foresee a long-term shift from gas to electric," he commented. "Until recently, 60 to 65 percent of all ranges sold were gas; now, 85 percent of all ranges being put into new homes are electric. Replacement sales are increasing in percentage in conversion from gas to electric, and there is a marked reduction of replacements from gas to gas."

Interchangeable versatile cooktops are one of the most popular recent additions to the cooking-appliance market, and a number of suppliers now offer the cooktops. Most offer not only conventional cooking elements, but also griddles, ceramic cooktops, barbecue grills, rotisseries, and the like. A number of the units now have self-contained, easy-to-clean ventilation systems that allow indoor barbecuing without outside ventilation.

Also new in the cooktop area is the induction cooktop. At the present time the induction field has relatively few suppliers, and the product is very expensive. But the clean lines and esthetics of the product have made it popular with some high-end home builders, and an expanding market exists for the product in kitchen remodeling.

With economies of scale and a decrease in the cost of electronic components, the cost of induction cooktops will come down somewhat in the next few years. And when the major range suppliers get into the business, the price will come down even faster.

Manufacturers already in the business say induction units have more to offer than mere esthetics. Jack Howser, manager of product planning of Roper Sales Corp., told MART that because the product begins to heat immediately when the cooktop is turned on, the unit is an energy saver. Induction cooktops are safer to use, he said, and spills won't bake onto the cooking surface, because the surface never gets hot.

Manufacturers agree that the ceramic cooktop is on the way out, despite the obvious esthetic appeal of the units. The cooktops have proven unpopular because they are not as efficient as conventional surface units, and they are difficult to clean.

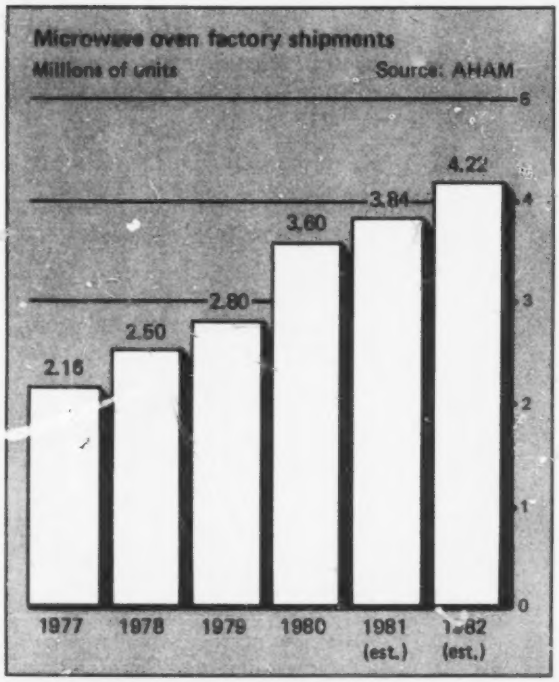
The overall cooking-appliance market is healthy, and it will get healthier when the homebuilding market improves. Consumers are demanding more versatility in their cooking appliances, and manufacturers are providing a wide assortment of versatile cooking appliances.

And despite the dire predictions and forecasts made over the years by microwave oven manufacturers, the microwave oven will not replace the conventional range. According to Jim Ruberti of Brown Stove, the microwave oven may serve to lengthen the life of a conventional oven, and in that regard may affect the replacement cycle of conventional ranges.

According to Roza of Hardwick, the purchase and use of a microwave oven might allow the consumer to postpone the purchase of a conventional range. But for the immediate future, a strong market exists for both conventional ranges and microwave ovens. ■

JOHN FOSTER

The changing mix: charting the trends in



Microwave ovens continue to increase at the expense of both gas and electric cooking appliances

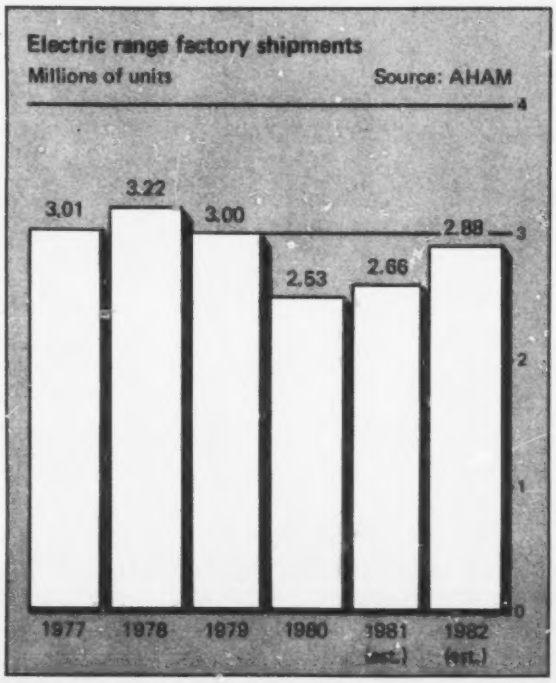
The last couple of years have not been easy ones for manufacturers and retailers of cooking appliances. The decline in the homebuilding market, or more specifically the decline in the number of new home completions, has hurt the business.

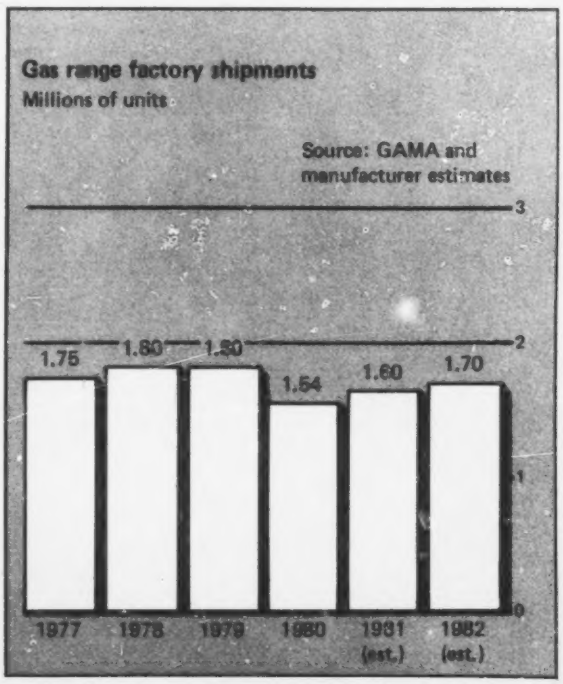
Sharp declines in factory unit shipments of both gas and electric ranges have been evident over the last two years. Final figures for 1981 are not likely to be much better.

The bright star in the cooking appliance field continues to be the microwave oven. Shipments and retail sales were up more than 35 percent in 1981, with factory shipments approaching the combined total of both gas and electric ranges.

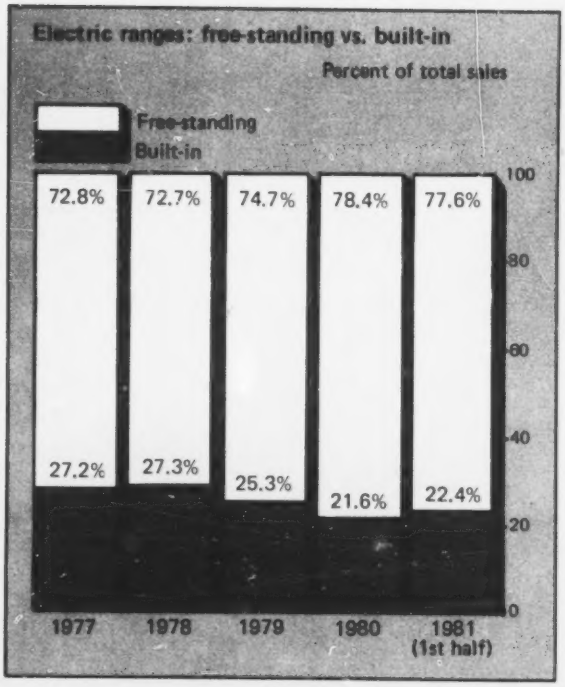
Manufacturers note that over the next few years the combination microwave range, the biggest dollar ticket in the cooking appliance business, will gain a larger share of the market.

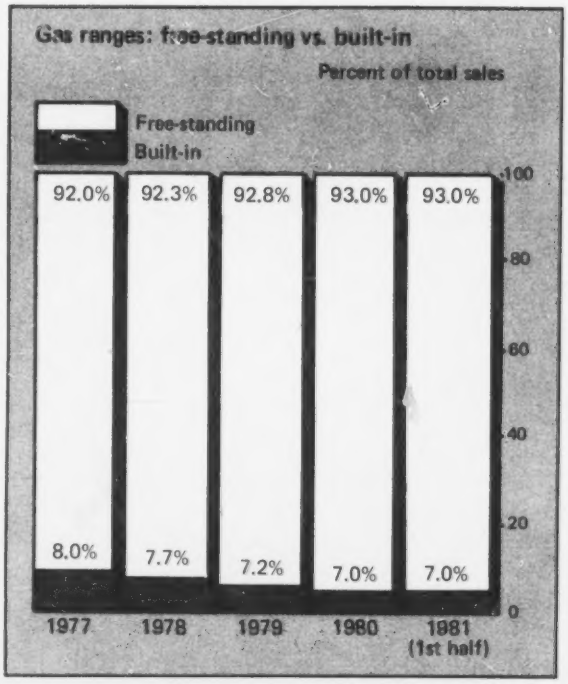
In the meantime, the market will recover slowly as the housing market recovers. There are millions of new household formations that will be formed in the next decade, and they will all need some sort of cooking appliance. ■

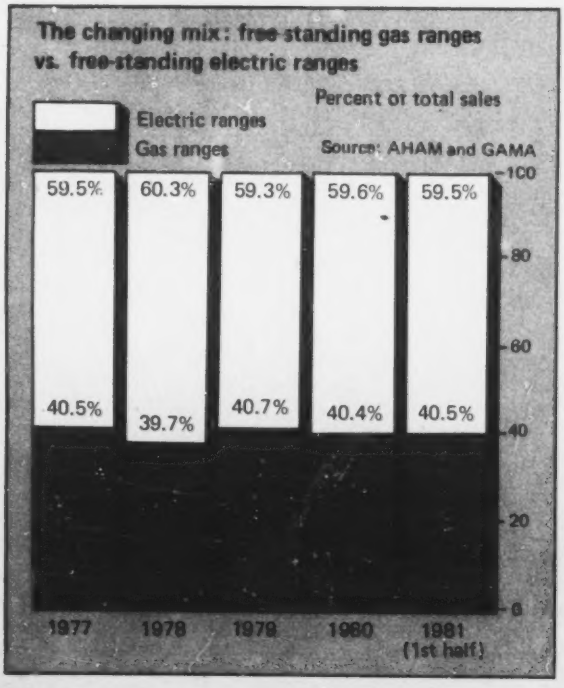


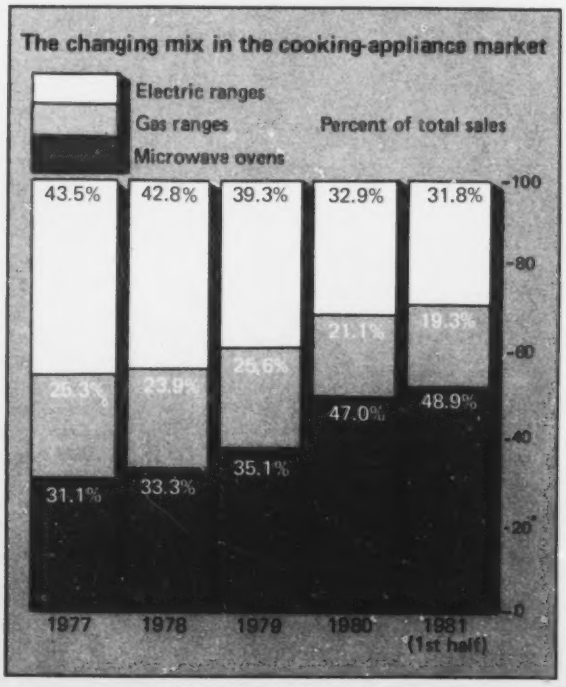


the cooking-appliance industry





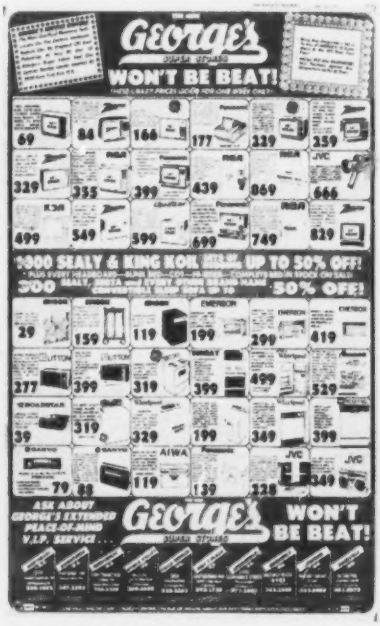




Range ads: what retailers are running

Co-op is key in determining how strongly ranges are featured

Kelly & Cohen



George's Superstores

Bernie's Appliance/TV

When does a range rate its own ad promotion?

When the manufacturer picks up the tab, that's when!

At least that's what it looked like to MART/Focus when we plowed through eight months worth of ad clippings in order to round up a representative selection.

We divided our collection into two simple categories: big ads, and small ads.

Big Ads

Big ads, we found, looked heavily co-oped. They often featured one manufacturer's label exclusively, maybe mentioning a secondary manufacturer's range. The ads seldom quoted specific prices, instead preferring vague terms: "Guaranteed lowest prices," "Special models, special values," and "At special low contractor prices." Or, the ads appeared as part of a manufacturer-sponsored event or rebate program.

Cliff Clark's Inc., in Toledo, OH, joined forces with Amana for a $50, $75, $100 rebate program. Although the ad quoted rebate figures, and referred to "already low discount prices," Clark's left out the original prices.

General Electric deserved the full credit for its manufacturer-sponsored appliance event in St. Paul, MN—retailers got a tag line. Not a price pull, this ad went for the upper-class status approach, with gray-tones and subtle shadings on the product illustrations. Phrases such as "special editions, special models, special values, at a very special event" reinforced class distinctiveness.

Standard Brands, Ft. Lauderdale, FL, tied in countertop microwave ovens, standard ovens, and versatile cook-top ranges in a single "We're cooking with a Spring clearance" promotion. Half the ad featured Jenn-Air ranges. Copy references to "Spring cooking clearance," and all Jenn-Air models "clearance priced"—as distinct from sale priced or discounted—gave the reader a feeling that the ranges were selling at prices cheaper than usual without ever using the words sale, reduced, or discounted. In all likelihood, these products really sold at Standard Brands' undiscounted, regular "low" prices. Nonetheless, the ad produced a "bargain" impression on the reader.

Bernie's Appliance/TV, Hartford, CT, sold Jenn-Air, Magic Chef, and a token Tappan at "special low contractor prices." Looking for replacement range sales, Bernie's emphasized energy savings over price cuts. Specific sale prices weren't mentioned, but alluded to *[Continued on page 10-S]*

Range advertising: what retailers are running

CLIFF CLARK and AMANA
TEAM UP WITH SAVINGS
and SERVICE during their . . .
ROUNDUP!
Buy Any Model Listed And Get a Rebate
Check Direct From Amana — Up to $100 Off!
Plus! CLIFF CLARK'S ALREADY LOW DISCOUNT PRICES
MICROWAVE COOKING CENTER
$100 REBATE
MICROWAVE COMBINATION OVEN
$75 REBATE
CLIFF CLARK SAYS:
BUY NO MICROWAVE WITHOUT A PROFESSIONAL COOKING SCHOOL. OURS IS A 3 HOUR COURSE IN OUR OWN STORE, NOT A ONE HOUR DEMONSTRATION
$50 REBATE
$50 REBATE
New Store Hours:
Mon. & Thurs. 9-9; Tues., Wed., Fri. 9-6; Sat. 9-3
BACKED WITH AWARD WINNING SERVICE

Cliff Clark's

General Electric

WILLIS APPLIANCE AND TV · AUDIO
LOCALLY OWNED FAMILY OPERATED
EXPANSION SALE
ANNOUNCING 2 NEW WILLIS STORES
NEW WEST SIDE STORE OPEN
NEW EAST SIDE STORE OPEN
WILLIS APPLIANCE & TV

Willis Appliance

Standard Brands

[Continued from page 8-S]
with a general tag line promising "special sale prices."

For Jenn-Air, Bernie's promoted a representative sample of its lineup, establishing itself as a grill-top/oven supply source.

Small Ads

Ranges aren't big news in small ads. But low prices are! Squeezed into a full-page ad for **Kelly & Cohen** (five stores in CT) was a tiny range sporting an attention-getting price tag. For $199, shoppers could walk out with any "Scratch 'n Dent Sale Price" gas or electric range including self-cleaning and microwave combinations. The limited-time-only pitch, low prices and hot red and yellow colors also promoted a sense of "buy now" urgency

Adding a new store is always a good excuse for a sale. **Willis Appliance, TV & Audio** opened up two stores in the Cleveland, OH, area and celebrated with an "Expansion Sale."

For Willis, more important than highlighting a particular product, or brand name, is creating an identity in the community as a one-stop, we-sell-everything shop.

George's Superstores, in the Washington, D.C., area, held a one-week "supermarket-style" sale. Advertising a G.E. electric range ($319) and a Sunray gas double oven ($399) revealed that George's is not just a one-brand, one-style retailer. Placing those two ranges in the middle of promotions for TVs, VCRs, air conditioners, car stereos, etc., helped promote George's as an electric-goods supermarket. ■

Selling ranges? It's a roller-coaster market

Seasonal or cyclical, range sales have dealers stonewalled

Selling ranges is an up and down business. When the economy is up, housing starts are up. When housing starts are up, range sales enjoy the upward ride.

Well, in most parts of the country, housing starts are not up. At best, they're fair-to-middling. As a result, range sales reports from MART/Focus' retailers are also fair-to-middling.

"Our range sales fluctuate," said Jo-Ann Meserve of Clyde Meserve Appliance, East Bridgewater, MA. "They go in spells. For a week, we'll go real heavy on ranges, and then we won't sell anything the next week. Then, for two weeks we'll sell a lot, and then there will be a slow period again.

"We average about 25 to 30 sales a month," she estimated. "I think the reason it gets slow now and then is because people like to look around. Maybe they figure, 'I'll wait until I get paid,' or they hope that next week someone else may have it cheaper."

"There hasn't been anything in range sales to speak of," an East Brunswick, NJ, Brick Church Appliance spokesperson told MART/Focus. "Things have been pretty average—not so good, not so bad. But they always pick up around Thanksgiving. Sales are always slow at the end of the summer, but the last week of November, they come back. It's just like air conditioners: they sell in the summer, but not in the winter."

At Clydes, ranges make up about 20 percent of that company's business. But at Brick Church, the percentage is even less: about 10 percent of total sales, or an average of six ranges a month.

At Kitchen Distributors of America, Rockford, IL, sales to home builders make up about 75 percent of the store's business. About half of those sales are on new home construction jobs, the others are for replacement and remodeling.

Freestanding ranges are a big seller for Kitchen Distributors. "We sell Tappan and Jenn-Air," said a spokesperson there. "Freestanding, basic Tappans are our biggest movers; mostly builders buy those. Prices are also holding in our area. Rockford is about the size of Peoria, only 100 miles away from Chicago. There is a lot happening and people are able to spend money."

Kitchen Distributors is one of the few retail outlets MART/Focus spoke to that displays its ranges as part of a full kitchen setup. "We don't have a live kitchen, but we do have several kitchen displays that people can look at. Usually we promote ranges with the cabinets."

B. Kessler, of Kessler Appliance, Iowa City, IA, said his range sales have slowed up recently. "Everything else is moving—refrigerators, washers, and so on. I don't know what's the cause of our range sales slowdown. Maybe it's because a lot of the new ranges are built-ins and we re not big in built-in ranges."

Dealers advised to look for a secondary marketplace

If ranges are not a profitable item for an appliance dealer, he or she would do well to take a look at his or her market approach.

Too often, a retailer depends on one segment of the market to carry him through the lean times as well as the fat. That retailer finds that there are peak times when his target audience can buy like crazy and all is well on his profit-and-loss statement. Then, too often, there are times when that market is glutted, and the single-segment retailer is left sitting on a pile of inventory, with no secondary markets to absorb his stock.

The retailer, who wants to make a sensible impact on the range market, focuses on more than one buying group, preferably in categories that complement each other. If a dealer trades mainly with home-building contractors, a complementary market could be direct retail replacement sales, or home remodeling involvement. Usually when one market is slack, the other still shows some life.

As with most of the retailers MART/Focus talked to, Kessler does not display his ranges in a kitchen setup or feature them much in store promotions.

Meserve, of Clyde Meserve Appliance, explained that her store doesn't single out ranges for promotions either. "But then," she added, "we only do full-line advertising. With our store, we don't promote anything special. Our best promotion is word of mouth—a lot of people telling their friends 'I got the best price on my range at Meserve.' "

AFO Stores, in Visalia, CA, runs multi-product ads, with a small portion mentioning ranges, as opposed to single product promotion. "We like to put in a variety of merchandise in our ads," said Roger Schmenger, general manager. "The purpose of our ads is to promote items that we really want to move in the store, what's in an ad varies."

AFO Stores has been in business one year, and carries Roper, Admiral, Crosley, Tappan, Whirlpool, Litton, and will order other brands on request. "We sell more gas than electric," Schmenger said. "And of those our best-selling category is built-ins. We sell retail and we sell to builders. A lot of people, when they're building a home, try to have built-ins put in whenever they can, or a slip-in model.

"Right now, we're trying to get all the builders in our area to buy from us, so we're trying to give them the best deal around. In general, I'd say the range business is slow for us. But that's because stoves don't wear out that much. If a person buys a good stove, like a Roper, it will last for 20-plus years."

Trade-ins are also a profitable supplement to range sales. Many retailers prefer not to touch that market, ("Who wants to buy an old, burned-out stove?" asked Schmenger). Those who encourage trade-ins find it adds a tidy sum to their profit column. "We service ranges and we take trade-ins," said Meserve. "I'd say repairs account for about 5 percent of our business. For trade-ins, we can give people between $10 and $50 on their used ranges, and the turnaround for us makes up between 10 and 15 percent of our business." ■

Chicago vendors stick combo ranges on a

Clever Consumer takes his Missus on search for the perfect combination-range sales pitch

There aren't many salesmanship "10s" for vendors of combination ranges in the Chicagoland market.

When MART/Focus' Clever Consumer and his Missus went searching for combination ovens in the Windy City, they whiffed the hot air of the small sales pitch.

Got a range

As the first stop on their journey, our Clever Pair breezed into a local Sears Roebuck range department and were promptly greeted by a salesman, who spotted them ambling down an aisle.

"Looking for a gas or electric?" he snared them.

"Uh, we've got a gas oven already," our Duo replied. "But we're looking for one that has microwave or convection."

"Gotcha," said the salesman, and led them to the one model on the floor that met our Shoppers' specs—an over and under unit with scan controls for power and temperature on the eye-level microwave oven, and a continuous clean lower gas oven.

"This one comes with a probe," he told them, adding, "you can cook either by time or temperature. The lower oven is continuous cleaning. We don't have self-cleaning in gas."

"What about convection ovens?" they asked.

"We used to have them, but not any more," the clerk replied, and moving back to the microwave oven combination, he zeroed in for a close: "I can get this one for you $150 off the tag price, with color for $1,399!"

"Thanks, we'll be back," murmured our Shoppers.

For the next two stops, the Clever Consumers bucked some stiff competition for the sales help's attention—a Chicago Cubs baseball game.

Strike one

One reluctant salesman admitted to working on the floor at Weiboldts. For the rest, the TV action in the adjacent electronics department was a bigger draw than a pair of "paying prospects."

Knowledgeable only when asked specific questions, the sales clerk volunteered little. So our Consumer Duo braced for an arduous interrogation.

"What's so good about convection ovens?" asked Mrs. Consumer, standing in front of a Tappan eye-level combination range.

"It cooks fast," the salesman shot back, keeping an eye on a nearby TV. "It has a squirrel cage fan that makes it cook faster by circulating the air."

She persisted: "It sure doesn't have many controls on the microwave oven. Why's that?"

"It's programmable," he replied. "It's a touch-control unit. It can defrost for so many minutes, then cook, and then keep the food warm."

When Our Couple commented on the amount of heat issuing from the vent of the lower, self-clean oven, the salesman assured them: "There's four to six inches of insulation in the oven." Then, he outlined the merits of his double-oven combination versus a single-cavity microwave range. "With the double oven, you can use both at the same time. And in case of a power failure, that might affect the electric ignition pilot, you can still light the surface burners with a match though you can't light the oven."

That concluded his pitch; his attention refocused on the game. So our Duo decided, "the heck with getting price info out of him," and left.

Strike out

Their luck wasn't much better at Polk Brothers. TV screens, with the Cubs in action, were everywhere. When they finally dragged a salesman away from a two-run homer spree, our Shoppers found him reluctant to answer their questions, and even less eager to step them up the line—a shame, because this store had the best selection of combo ranges thus far. Polk offered a number of Calorics, Magic Chefs, and Tappans in gas; and an even wider selection in electrics.

Although the salesman did draw a connection between convection and energy savings, and supplied our Couple with a brochure outlining convection cooking benefits, this salesman was grossly underinformed about the features of each range.

"I think you can light the pilot with a match," he insisted, trying to show how

back burner

to light the pilotless range he was demonstrating. "I know it's here, I just can't find it," he said, finally giving up.

Thrice-baked goods

The next stop was less fruitless. West Suburban Appliance, in Hinsdale, featured one combination microwave range, a Hardwick. But the salesman who approached them worked hard to convince our Couple that it was the best model on the market.

"This oven has the best finish, because its continuous clean is baked three times, not just once like the other manufacturers' applications. So, you don't get spotting," he enthused. "It also has touch-control microwave and a continuous-clean lower oven."

This staffer expressed doubts about combination ranges as a concept. "When the microwave oven or the range goes, you have to replace both, not just the one that breaks down," he told our Consumers.

"You're better off buying them as separate appliances," he encouraged. "And you can get them as built-ins, as well." He provided the pair with the built-in's vertical measurements so they could check if their kitchen could accommodate the units.

Then, he led them through a cleaning demonstration, showing how the surface section of the range lifted up, so spills could be wiped up from the burner box. He also explained how the gas burners unplugged for washing. And then, as a parting shot, he told our Crew, "West Suburban services what it sells."

At Wards, Our Shoppers spotted a lone saleswoman engaged with another customer. She smiled at the two, and promised to "be with you in a minute!"

In her pitch, she pointed out the two gas microwave combinations available, each selling for $1,099.97. One was a single-cavity convection and self-cleaning oven unit, and the other a touch-control eye-level microwave oven with a continuous-clean lower oven.

Although she too made no effort to close, this clerk did point out both units' convenience features. "The continuous cleaning has been improved since it first came out," she assured the Dynamic Duo. "And although the microwave combo does not have a self-clean finish on the door or bottom of the oven, the door does lift off easily for convenient cleaning. The one-piece, plug-out gas burners just pop off, and can be washed in the dishwasher."

At J.C. Penney, the saleswoman untangled herself from another customer to join our Duo.

The store's only gas combination oven was an eye-level microwave range with continous clean lower oven tagged at $1,219. So, the clerk suggested an alternative to buying a combination: "If you use a conventional, free-standing model plus a separate microwave countertop oven placed on a shelf above, you can buy the range for $400, instead of the $1,200 price of a combo. The countertop unit would be extra though." Then she took out a tape measure to illustrate her point.

Penneys was also the sole outlet to display a sales aid for the pilotless ignition on gas ranges.

It's a hit

"See this microwave oven," said the Marshall Field salesman, pointing to a Caloric eye-level combination. "It has a roto wave near the top that distributes the heat evenly so you don't have to move the food."

So he began the best sales pitch our Consumers had heard all day. The Marshal Field staffer left no stone unturned in teaching the two about combination ovens.

On convection, he reported those ovens cooked 30 percent faster than conventional ranges, but tended to dry out food. He discouraged them from buying a continuous-clean gas range, because he believed those ovens didn't self-clean well, and their cleaning cycle couldn't be supplemented with oven cleaner.

"Plus," he added, "we're the only store that gives you a two-year parts and labor warranty. When a manufacturer's warranty ends, usually after a year, he'll ask you if you want to buy a service contract for another $90. With us, there's no charge for service for two years."

"Sold," the MART/Focus Clever Consumers said. ■

Strike-out selling

Times can't be that tough, when a TV baseball game draws more attention than paying customers!

Though MART/Focus' Clever Consumers tried hard to part with some bucks on their Chicagoland tour, it was no go. Combination ranges are obviously not a popular sell with the Windy City sales force.

That's why this month's award goes to Marshall Field. The store boasted a reasonable oven selection and an attentive salesman to boot!

Congratulations. Your plaque is in the mail!